

**The Early Coins
of America**

Sylvester S. Crosby

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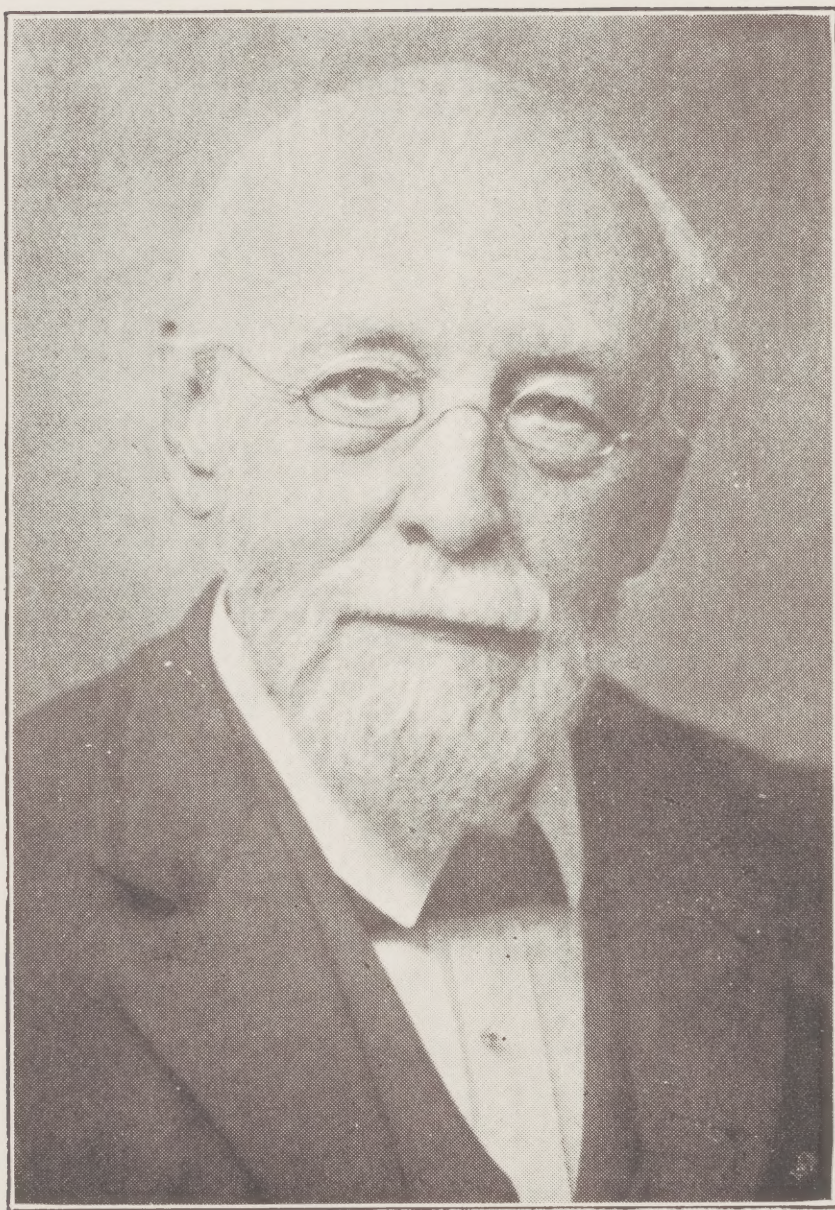


**MISSOURI
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THE EARLY COINS
OF AMERICA



Sylvester Sage Crosby
1831-1914

The Early Coins of America

Sylvester S. Crosby

QUARTERMAN PUBLICATIONS, INC.
Lawrence, Massachusetts

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CENTENNIAL FOREWORD

To anyone interested in American numismatics *The Early Coins of America* and its author, Sylvester Sage Crosby, need no introduction. Nevertheless, both the centennial of the publication of this monumental undertaking and the bicentennial of the American Revolution justify further commentary on the creation and the long term influence of this numismatic masterpiece.

In 1869, when the New England Numismatic and Archaeological Society appointed Crosby as chairman of a committee of six to publish a book on the early coinage of America, the existing general references on the subject were *An Historical Account of American Coinage* (Albany 1858) by John H. Hickcox and *American Numismatical Manual* (Philadelphia 1859, 1860 and 1865) by Montroville W. Dickeson. Hickcox had made a fine start in the assembly of documentary material. Dickeson's work, in spite of an enthusiastic approach, an extensive scope, variety designations, detailed tables, and profuse hand-drawn illustrations was readily recognized to be incomplete and quite inaccurate. A real need for a scientific research project in the field was therefore a stimulant to such an undertaking. Photographic reproduction of coins had also become more feasible. Crosby enthusiastically accepted the challenge and received the cooperation of numismatic collectors, dealers, and historians but only minimal help from his own committee. In July 1869, as he began his research, he wrote an open letter, published in the *American Journal of Numismatics*, requesting rubbings, foil impressions, coins and information. His own gathering of detail from 1869 through 1872 required superb efficiency and intense devotion. The minutes of the sponsoring society show a discussion of the matter only

Note: Certain documents, notices and other material relating to the historical background of *The Early Coins of America* are reproduced in a Bibliographical Appendix at the end of this volume. This material is referred to in this Centennial Foreword along with items which are part of the book itself.

at their April 21, 1870 meeting. The first portions of the manuscript and much of the balance of it must have been completed prior to the letter prospectus dated November 1, 1872 in which it was stated that 350 copies of the book were to be printed at a cost of \$10 each and that the book would also appeal to other than those interested in numismatics. Unfortunately, by July 1875, when the final portions of the book were printed, only 22 organizations and 138 individuals had subscribed. The problems Crosby faced during those years were staggering.

Publication of the book was to begin early in 1873. It was originally to be composed of ten parts of 32 quarto pages each. Each such part was to have one plate of photographic illustrations in addition to extensive line drawings of coins. One part was to be issued each month. Each part was sent out in a gray-green paper wrapper featuring the title of the work and showing the part number, the price of the part, and the year. These wrappers carried many clues to the problems of the publication. The first page of the first five wrappers contains the imprint, "Charles Chaplin, Printer, 89 Washington Street, Boston," under the border. Charles Chaplin was the vice-president of the New England Numismatic and Archaeological Society and the member who had suggested the coinage research project. He also was a member of the committee of publication. His name was removed as printer beginning with the wrapper for Part 6. His name as printer was on the back of the originally-intended title page dated 1873, but "T. R. Marvin & Son, Printers, Boston" and that firm's elaborate insignia were substituted for Chaplin's name when the back of the approved title page dated 1875 was printed.

The book's originally-intended title page dated 1873, which came with Part 1, shows the New England Numismatic and Archaeological Society as publisher, whereas the approved title page dated 1875 and the wrapper for combined Parts 11 & 12 which contained it, showed "Published by the Author." Similarly the originally-intended 3-page undated "Introduction" acknowledged the cooperation of 22 persons and was signed "The Committee of Publication," whereas the approved "Introduction" dated July 1, 1875, which came with Parts 11 & 12, expressed appreciation to 26 persons and was signed "S. S. Crosby." On the inside of the wrapper containing combined Parts 11 & 12, the instruction was given to substitute the title page dated 1875 and the approved "Introduction" for those furnished with Part 1.

Advertisements for Crosby's book were placed on the inside of the wrappers of the *American Journal of Numismatics* for all four issues of 1873 and the first two issues

of 1874. These carried generally the same text as the letter prospectus of November 1, 1872 with the date changed. Crosby distributed another broadside solicitation for subscribers in November 1873; announced in October 1874 the necessity for Parts 11 & 12 at an additional subscription cost of \$2; and distributed a final sales prospectus when the book was completed in July 1875.

Crosby admitted in the approved "Introduction" that his task was "arduous" and that the assistance promised him did not materialize. It is a common experience that work assigned to a committee often ends up either with one member doing all the work or with no worthwhile work being done at all. Numismatics can be grateful that in this case it was the first alternative which took place! The work load in copying manuscripts, assembling text, studying coin varieties, checking prior published data, screening opinions of others, assembling coins for photography, preparing tables, developing coin drawings, proofreading, etc. — all without typewriter or photocopies — must have been overwhelming. To add to the problem, it is obvious that Crosby's non-profit project created serious personal economic problems for him. With only 160 subscriptions sold out of an expectation of 350, the receipts after the price raise from \$10 to \$12, were only \$1,920 instead of the expected \$4,200. It seems logical to assume that the lack of adequate funds was the primary cause of Crosby taking over the function of the New England Numismatic and Archaeological Society as publisher. It is also understandable that Charles Chaplin, as printer of the first five parts, was not sure that his future printing charges would be paid and did not wish to proceed. T. R. Marvin & Son which printed the *American Journal of Numismatics* must have taken over the printing of Part 6 and subsequent parts on a credit basis or on Crosby's personal promise of payment. Thus Crosby, intending only to be author and committee chairman, became promotion manager, financial backer and publisher as well.

The Boston Numismatic Society of which Crosby was an active member and officer kept the public aware of the progress of *The Early Coins of America* by including in its *American Journal of Numismatics* notices about and excerpts from Crosby's book. In its April 1873 Journal it was mentioned that Part 1 was just issued; in July 1873 that Part 2 was "on our table;" and in October 1873 that Part 3 was distributed. Crosby's own advertising circular continued the chronology of publication by stating in November 1873 that five parts had been published. The October 1874 Journal commented that "the tenth and probably the last number" was in the press, but by the time Part 10 was sent out Crosby enclosed with it a separate

announcement of the expansion of his book into Parts 11 & 12. The Journal for July 1875 showed frustration because of the delay when it said that the "Eleventh and last number is finally complete."

It was not until December 4, 1873, over one year after the original solicitation, that the Boston Numismatic Society which had its own library decided to subscribe to Crosby's work. Another innocent but possibly discouraging action affecting subscriptions to Crosby's book may have been the publication in the *American Journal of Numismatics* of edited and illustrated excerpts: in October 1873 one on Massachusetts silver coinage; in January 1875 one on Vermont coinage; in July 1875 one on Fugio coinage; and in October 1875 one on Nova Constellatio coinage. Appreciation for the first of these excerpts was given to the New England Numismatic and Archaeological Society by the *Journal* editor, who stated, "We are indebted to publishers of *The Early Coins of America* for the obliging manner with which they have allowed us to use the cuts for the following article, and to make copious extracts from their work, now in course of publication." When the *Journal* published the three subsequent excerpts in 1875 the editor acknowledged to Crosby personally appreciation for permission to use the text and cuts. It is hard to understand why the author permitted these major excerpts to be published when subscriptions to the 350 copies of his book had not yet been forthcoming.

A critical review of Crosby's book by Dr. Edward Maris was published in the October 1875 *American Journal of Numismatics* to which the editors of the Journal added their praise but disagreed with the adverse comment of Maris as to Crosby's omission of certain items because Crosby classified them as medals.

Born on September 2, 1831 in Charlestown, New Hampshire, Crosby was the youngest of eleven children of a pastor of the Congregational church and his wife. Crosby moved to Boston to learn and undertake a watchmaker's trade. While he was writing *The Early Coins of America*, he acquired a residence at 21 Sacramento Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he lived until his death on August 18, 1914. In 1873 his watch and jewelry business was at 240 Washington Street in downtown Boston, but in 1875 the street was renumbered so as to change his address to 444 Washington Street. His avocations included not only numismatics beginning in 1857, but also archeology, astronomy, and mushroom culture. His first published numismatic writing was on the varieties of U.S. 1793 cents, which was included in the *American Journal of Numismatics* beginning in April, 1869. To this he added 1793 half cent varieties, culminating in the publication of a consolidated reprint entitled *United States Coinage of 1793* (Boston 1897).

The Early Coins of America truly electrified numismatists with an awareness of the uniqueness of the coinage of the colonial American period and the era of independence prior to the operation of the U.S. Mint. Stimulated by Crosby's excellence, portion after portion of his book has been amplified by the research of others in the century since its publication. He also supplemented his own work with articles in the *American Journal of Numismatics* on Sommer Islands Coins (1833), Fugio hub impressions (1902), and U.S. 1804 coinage records (1891). Although many have dreamed of revising his book no one has done so as yet. The standard of excellence which it set has influenced those who work in the field to do research of the highest scholarship. Fortunately, there have been many of such projects published, and Crosby lived long enough to see some of them. In his field Crosby had solved virtually all of the routine numismatic problems as well as many difficult ones so that those who walk in his footsteps have a steep hill to climb. The bibliography of books and articles which use or cite portions of *The Early Coins of America* as a reference is almost endless. His accuracy in detail is overwhelming and, although omissions and errors can be found in his book, it is amazing that there are not more. Crosby wisely protected himself as to some matters which he could not research and solve personally by giving the statements or opinions of others. Characteristically he placed an old couplet on the errata page,

"Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see
thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er will be".

One of Crosby's major innovations was the separate designation of an obverse die variety with a number and a reverse die variety with a letter (as he had done in 1869 with 1793 cent varieties). This was particularly important in coinages where multiple die interlocking was prevalent. This classification improvement has been accepted as obviously logical and has been used in most American die variety work since then.

In honor of his achievement Crosby was elected as an Honorary Member of the American Numismatic and Archaeological Society (now the American Numismatic Society) on March 21, 1876. Of the six numismatic scholars whose names were cut in the frieze of the front facade of the 1930 addition to the American Numismatic Society headquarters in New York, Crosby was the only American. He was elected as an Honorary Member of the American Numismatic Association on September 4, 1907 and to its Hall of Fame in August, 1970.

Only one complete example of the Crosby work in original wrappers has been located, formerly having been the property of the American Museum of Natural

History. The Library of Congress has the wrappers for Part 1 and Parts 11 & 12 in one of its examples. Virtually all subscribers when they had the parts bound, threw away the wrappers which were on very poor quality paper. The instructions to substitute the approved title and "Introduction" furnished with combined Parts 11 & 12 for the originally-intended title and "Introduction" were generally followed. The few who retained the originally-intended title and "Introduction" bound these pages in with the others. There were specific binding instructions (principally plate locations) included in Parts 11 & 12 and these had to be bound into the book because an explanation of "marks and contractions" was printed on the other side of the same sheet. However, binding instructions were not always adhered to, one variation being the placement of the plates at the end of the book. This was quite practical as the reader of the text would not then have to guess where to look for applicable plates. Dr. Thomas Hall who expanded Crosby's Connecticut coinage work had his copy of *The Early Coins of America* bound in that manner. This reprint also adopts that order.

In the April 1876 *American Journal of Numismatics* Dr. Edward Maris offered for 50 cents a plate of 48 varieties of Connecticut, Vermont, and New Jersey coppers not illustrated in Crosby. This plate was purchased by some subscribers and, if their book had not already been bound, was usually inserted opposite page 282. The Maris plate was produced by the Woodburytype process. It contained a transposition of 1787 reverses in varieties 4-M and 6-L as pointed out by Dr. Hall in his 1892 publication.

The ten illustrative Heliochrome Patent plates in Crosby are superbly executed considering the modest state of development of photography and graphic arts at that time. The process involved the photography of the coins or impressions of them, producing a normal negative on glass. Before the photographs were made, printed coin identification numbers were added to the first five plates while only written numbers were on the later plates. Then a positive was printed on a gelatin film, which was hardened with chrome alum. Printing was accomplished directly from the treated gelatin film. At least one of the plates had to be reprinted because of an error, Plate V being originally misnumbered Plate IX. On that plate the handwritten numbering of the coins was changed to printed numbering when the correction was made. The Woodburytype process used for the Maris plate is the same as Heliochrome Patent except that a transfer to a metal plate is made for printing. The Woodburytype process is now known as collotype printing.

There is an inconsistency in the dates on the wrappers of Parts 7 through 10 which are dated 1873, in that the contents enclosed with them were not printed

until 1874. This can either be explained as an unimportant error or it can be justified if these four wrappers were printed in advance at one time in anticipation of adherence to the planned schedule of publication.

Inquiry has often been made as to how the filing in the Clerk's office of the Librarian of Congress can be dated 1873 on the back of the title page of all editions when there was no 1873 edition and when the book was still being printed in 1874 and 1875. The copyright was entered on January 30, 1873 as No. 817. Since the book came out in parts the date of the filing of Part 1 was retained even though subsequent parts were filed with the Clerk through 1875. This may have allowed Crosby to avoid refileing for a copyright in 1875.

There is an 1878 edition of "Crosby" that is identical to the 1875 edition except in the title page. In addition to the change in publication date to 1878 the publisher was given as "Boston—Estes & Lauriat—301 Washington St." and Crosby is no longer designated as publisher. The 1776 Massachusetts State copper illustrated on the title page has had the "AE" removed from the ligature connecting the obverse and reverse in the 1878 edition as someone must have felt that the designation of the metal was not consistent with the other illustrations in the book. The 1878 edition contained the same errata page as the 1875 edition, and none of the corrections were made in the 1878 edition text. If any other changes had been made the corrections undoubtedly would have been made. The original "Directions to the Binder" was not eliminated in the 1878 edition even though the publisher had all of that edition bound. The existing number of 1878 editions appears to be no more than one fourth of the number of 1875 editions. These facts as to the 1878 edition lead to the conclusion that the unsold unbound parts which still remained in Crosby's possession as publisher were disposed of by Crosby to Estes & Lauriat, who after having the front and back of a new 1878 title page printed by T. R. Marvin & Son, bound the books and sold them to the public without any textual, plate or other changes. The 1878 edition is therefore not a rerun from the stereotype forms and Heliotype plates. This means that there were only 350 copies of *The Early Coins of America* (plus possibly a small overrun to cover damaged or lost pages) in the combined 1875 and 1878 editions.

The scarcity of the original editions of Crosby has made the book itself a collector's item. Originals usually have half-leather bindings with boards covered in red, maroon, green or black cloth. *The Early Coins of America* is truly the keystone to any American numismatic library, and studying coins with or merely reading an original edition gives one an extra appreciation of it.

The book was first reprinted by R. Green in 1945 (500 copies) and later to a modest extent by others. In this centennial period because of expanded numismatic interest many numismatists and libraries will welcome the opportunity to acquire a quality reprint.

The *Colonial Newsletter* has been acting as a clearing house for refinements in the field of Crosby's work since 1960, and James C. Spilman, its editor, has been most helpful with respect to this foreword. Edward R. Barnsley has contributed extensive bibliographical and biographical material. The help of Richard Picker is also gratefully acknowledged.

St. Louis, Missouri
June 1974

Eric P. Newman